THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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PRESS RELEASE

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Photography exhibition and other programs honor Martin Luther King, Jr.

William Earle Williams' photographs of Gettysburg National Military Park are quiet reminders of the historical and symbolic importance of one of the Civil War's grimmest conflicts. Twenty-six of his black-and-white pictures make up **William Earle Williams: Photographs of the Gettysburg Battlefield**, on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from January 19 through March 25, 1990. Williams will discuss the history of the battle and the context in which he made his photographs of the battlefield in a lecture at the Museum on Sunday, February 4, at 3:30 pm, "Gettysburg: An Imaginative Journey in Photographs." His exhibition and lecture, along with a showing of Gordon Parks' landmark film The Learning Tree (Saturday, February 3, at 2 pm), constitute the Museum's Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration.

Williams says he tries "to rediscover the sacredness of the ground" where nearly 50,000 Americans lost their lives 127 years ago in the Gettysburg campaign. It was the turning point of the Civil War, which he believes "became a war to free the slaves and to provide the constitutional groundwork for civil rights for all American citizens." Over the past three years he has photographed Gettysburg in the light of various seasons and times of day using an 8 x 10 view camera and 2-1/4 inch cameras. Up hills, across endless fields and pastures, and through woods, his views encompass the space in which soldiers fought and monuments placed in their memory, some piercing the sky and others barely visible in the grass. A rear view of a monument carved as though a real soldier had turned to stone while patrolling the forest gives the impression that the viewer follows in his tracks. Other carefully composed images record a stone "tent," tightly closed, simply inscribed "32D MASS."; an intricately carved Celtic cross on whose base is listed casualties in each regiment of New York's

Irish Brigade; and a sidelong view of the monument honoring the Sixth Ohio Cavalry, with a cavalryman on his horse at full gallop.

Born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1950, Williams grew up in Warren, Ohio, received his B.A. in history from Hamilton College, Clinton, New York, and his M.F.A. from the Yale School of Art. The works that first brought him critical attention are direct, candid black-and-white photos of Philadelphia society at formal parties, made with a hand-held camera and strobe lights. He has photographed people at weddings, graduations, horse shows, and country fairs. Williams is professor of fine arts at Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania. He lent the photographs for this exhibition, organized by Tom E. Hinson, curator of contemporary art.

The 1969 film The Learning Tree is an autobiographical work about a young black boy's coming of age in a small midwestern town in the 1920s; what he learns about honor and integrity leads him to save a white man's life at the expense of a black man's life. The beautifully shot film, starring Kyle Johnson and Alex Clarke (color, 107 min.), has recently been selected by the Library of Congress as one of the first twenty-five movies to be placed on the National Film Registry. The Museum will show the 35mm Warner Brothers studio print.

Hollywood's first black director of major films, Parks was born in 1912 in Fort Scott, Kansas, the youngest of fifteen children in a poor farm family. He rose from such early jobs as busboy and basketball player to work as a Life magazine photographer-reporter from 1948 to 1968. He not only directed, but also produced and wrote the screenplay and music for The Learning Tree, which was his first feature film; he is perhaps more popularly known for his second--Shaft (1971). He has also written autobiographical books, poetry, and fiction; most recently, he has composed the music and libretto for the classical ballet "Martin," and directed the production of this work that is his personal tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr.

Admission to the Museum and to all these programs is free.

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